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The Galaxy SIII: A Philosophical Catalyst

I loathed an entire half of my being for some time. I am a cynic, a hedonic, a narcissist, and an inconvenient pragmatist. Images of the atrocities that I see float through my head at night, and I wonder how I can live with my decisions after witnessing such horror and making rationalizations like, “I’m just a teenager” or “It’s not my responsibility.” I wake up every morning thinking of how to improve myself, how to learn more about this world and as Gandhi once said, “Be the change [I] want to see in the world”, but no matter what I read, or what I think, or what I say, I always come up short of what I expect. I put my heart and soul into every endeavor and, similar to Tantalus and his punishment in Hades, still come out unsatisfied. Even on those rare occasions that I meet my goals, I think back and wonder "Why didn't I do more? Why didn't I reach higher? I could have done better. This world is mine for the taking if I would just stop screwing around like an entitled brat and focus on leaving a positive influence." My conscious serves as the rope in the perennial match of tug-of-war between two forces, a game that fulfills no purpose but to invalidate the readings of my moral compass. Like Frederick Nietzsche, I can sense the God (or Napoleonic. Yes, I am that lost) complex at work within my soul, telling me that nothing can stop me, that I can literally leap off the roof of my home and take flight if I so desire; it blinds me with arrogance and attempts to pull me past success and happiness onto the quickest path to self-destruction with empty promises gilded in celestial bronze rivaling the God-given armor of Achilles in allure. The exclusive knowledge of my own flaws serves as the other contender in this twisted game, beseeching me to stay back, to not even contemplate, much less dare, to venture into this cold, unforgiving world. “I can’t fail if I don’t try,” my insecurities whisper. The result of this contest is yet another teenager that feels like his angst is simultaneously tearing him in two and suffocating him; he is apprehensive of the world around him and unsure of anything but that he is his own worst enemy. My struggle with the destructive forces within me culminated over the recent Christmas break and I am sure of one more thing: altruism is always right.

On December 23rd, 2012, I was in Nigeria, immersing myself in the Christmas spirit by assisting my father and uncle with the charity distribution to widows. The widows, beaming so brightly that I can sense Apollo quiver in envy, welcome us with exuberance as we stride into the venue and shower us with blessings as we hand them the meat and rice. I desperately yearn to tell them we are equals, we are all human beings, and we all should strive to assist other human beings if provided with the opportunity. Alas, my message falls on deaf ears, and this failure prevents me from doing anything but accepting their blessings with a sad smile. Despite the incredible opportunity to help more than 1300 widowed mothers, I still couldn’t see the magnitude of the impact that my family and I made through benevolent action. I could only think of what more I could do, how I could help on a larger scale.

Five days after the meat and rice distribution, I dropped and cracked my Samsung Galaxy SIII. Sleek and powerful, it had made a transition from just being my smartphone to a symbol of efficiency in my life in less than three months. I can still recall thinking to myself, “What did I just do? This thing is just an ugly paperweight now!” I mull over the thought of a $180 screen replacement until I remembered the widows. “Those women were happy with a little rice and meat that they had to share with their kids, and I’m sulking over *a damn cell phone*. A cell phone *that is fully operational.*” I think about my four pairs of running shoes, each worth over $100 when I bought them, my $300 PlayStation 3, my $900 laptop. My vexation instantaneously transformed into guilt and shame when I thought of my shoes, but as I continue to mentally enumerate luxury after luxury, I become increasingly uncomfortable until I could hear Marry Warren from Arthur Miller’s *The Crucible* shrieking, “You’re the devil’s man!” (121). Lying in my bed later that night, I think of nothing but how much I had changed. I thought of how my moral perspective on things had shifted from absolute to relative in the face of my materialistic desires. Thinking about my decisions reminds me of the first two lines in Kanye West’s “Can’t Tell Me Nothing”, in which he says, “I had a dream I could buy my way to heaven. When I woke up I spent that on a necklace.” These lines prompt me to question myself: If I could bring peace to my soul by giving up my possessions, would I do it? As I ponder how far my decisions have taken me from who I want to be, I think of Sun Tzu’s, author of *The Art of War*, advice: “It is said that if you know yourself and know your enemy, you will not be imperiled in one hundred battles.” In that moment, an epiphany strikes me: the knowledge of my flaws should not be preventing me from reaching success; it should be something that deters me from failure. I know human nature. More importantly, I know my nature. I can win this fight and I know exactly how to do it.

I now see the other half of me, the side with positive potential, and it is beautiful. I am generous and optimistic and idealistic. You, the reader, may think that I have eradicated my darker side, but I have done much better: I have reconciled with him, bringing unity to my soul.